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MILE-A-MINUTE WEED (*Polygonum perfoliatum* L.)



Dense mats of mile-a-minute weed (*Polygonum perfoliatum*) overgrow a forest edge completely covering other vegetation.

Photo by Randy Westbrooks, USGS

INTRODUCTION

Mile-a-minute weed (*Polygonum perfoliatum* L.) is an annual or perennial vine in the Polygonaceae or Buckwheat family. It is native to eastern Asia including India, Bhutan, Nepal, China, Burma, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Siberia, the Philippines, New Guinea, the Malay peninsula and the Indochina peninsula. The plant was introduced into the United States in the 1930s at a plant nursery in York County, Pennsylvania and an introduction garden in Prince Georges County, Maryland. Although mile-a-minute weed was eradicated from the introduction garden, it became established and eventually spread from the Pennsylvania site. During the last 55 years, the range for mile-a-minute weed has expanded in several directions for approximately 300 miles.

ECOLOGICAL THREAT

Mile-a-minute weed grows rapidly, out-competing native species by blocking available light. It infests nurseries, orchards, openings in forested areas, roadsides and drainage ditches. As an early successional species, mile-a-minute weed grows rapidly in areas previously treated with herbicides such as kudzu eradication sites, powerline rights-of-way and recreational areas. Plant diversity is greatly reduced in these areas. Subsequently, wildlife species are affected by diminished food and habitat sources.

ECONOMIC DAMAGE

Mile-a-minute weed is a particular threat to forest regeneration by out-competing tree seedlings. It is extremely difficult to eradicate with a single herbicide application due to prolonged seed persistence in the soil. The seeds may survive in the soil for up to four years. Mile-a-minute weed also infests recreational and residential areas. Dense thickets of the sharp-spined plants can provide an unpleasant experience for tourists.

IDENTIFICATION AND BIOLOGY

Mile-a-minute weed varies in height depending on habitat. In open areas, dense mats are formed covering everything including small trees and shrubs. At forest edges, plants climb on other vegetation reaching up to 8 m in height. The light green, triangular leaves, 4 to 7 cm long and 5 to 9 cm wide, are alternately arranged along the stem. The stems are green, turning reddish with age and becoming woody near the base. The main veins, petioles and stems have sharp, recurved hook-like barbs. The ocrea, a saucer shaped sheath 1 to 2 cm in diameter encircles the node. The inflorescence is a spike-like cluster of 10 to 15 tiny white flowers. The fruits resemble blueberries and are 5 mm in diameter, arranged in clusters. Each fruit contains a single round, shiny-black achene. Annual plants have shallow, fibrous roots. In the eastern United States, mile-a-minute weed germinates in full sun in early spring, flowering begins in



Triangular leaves, recurved barbs, and numerous bright blue fruits make mile-a-minute weed easy to identify.

Photo by Denise Binion, FHTET

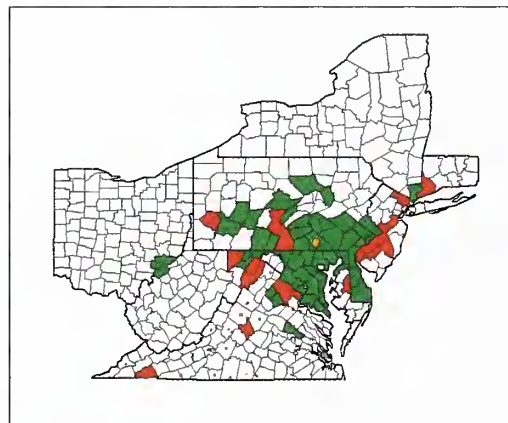


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early June or July, and fruits are produced between early August and the first frost, usually mid-October.

DISTRIBUTION

Mile-a-minute weed is currently found in Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Washington, D. C., and West Virginia. Fifteen additional states within Plant Hardiness zones 6 and 7 have climates favorable to mile-a-minute weed establishment, growth and spread.



Current distribution of mile-a-minute weed by county in the eastern United States. (green - prior to 1995; red - after 1995; yellow - York County, PA) Pre 1995 data courtesy of Will Mountain. Map data prepared by Yun Wu, map by Lituo Huang

HABITAT

Mile-a-minute weed is a colonizer of disturbed sites and open areas, wetlands, forest edges, stream banks, roadsides, and open fields. Although it can tolerate partial shade, mile-a-minute utilizes its ability to attach to other plants and climb over them to reach higher light levels. Mile-a-minute weed prefers moist soils, but survives in relatively dry areas.

CONTROL AND MANAGEMENT

Mechanical Methods

Handpulling, weeding and cultivation are useful for small infestations. Hand pulling of seedlings should be done before the sharp recurved barbs harden. Plant removal can continue throughout the summer, but is more effective when done before seeds are produced. Repeated mowing and trimming will prevent flowering and reduce or eliminate seed production. However, seeds that remain in the ground may germinate for up to four years.

Cultural Methods

Maintain vegetation continuity and avoid creating gaps in existing vegetation. Maintain vegetative buffers along streams and forest edges to prevent establishment of and seed dispersal.

Herbicides

Glyphosate applied at a low rate will probably be effective in killing mile-a-minute weed. Prior approval and recommendations should be obtained from the department of agriculture in the state where the application will take place.



An adult weevil, *Rhinoncominus latipes*, has been released as a biological control agent against mile-a-minute weed in New Jersey and Delaware.

Photo by Ding Jianqing

Biological Control

From 1997 to 2002, weed populations were surveyed in China and 111 insect species were collected and identified. Among the insect species, a weevil, *Rhinoncominus latipes* Korotyaev (Coleoptera: Curculionidae) proved to be the most promising biological control agent. The larva of the weevil causes damage to mile-a-minute weed by boring into the plant's stem. In 2000-2004 *R. latipes* was shipped to a Delaware quarantine facility for host range testing. In 2004, *R. latipes* was reared at the University of Delaware and released in New Jersey and Delaware based on recommendations of Technical Advisory Group (TAG), which functions under APHIS Plant Protection and Quarantine (APHIS-PPQ).

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Visit the following websites for additional information on mile-a-minute weed:

www.invasive.org/eastern/biocontrol/26MileAMinute.html
www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/pope1.htm

CONTACT

Yun Wu, USDA Forest Service, Forest Health Technology Enterprise Team (FHTET), 180 Canfield Street, Morgantown, WV 26505. (304) 285-1594, ywu@fs.fed.us

Author: Denise E. Binion,
 USDA Forest Service, FHTET, Morgantown, WV.



Pesticide Precautionary Statement

Pesticides used improperly can be injurious to humans, animals, and plants. Follow the directions and heed all precautions on the labels.

Note: Some States have restrictions on the use of certain pesticides. Check your State and local regulations. Also, because registrations of pesticides are under constant review by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency, consult your county agricultural agent or State extension specialist to be sure the intended use is still registered.

Prepared by:



USDA Forest Service
 Northeastern Area
 State and Private Forestry
 11 Campus Boulevard, Suite 200
 Newtown Square, PA 19073
www.na.fs.fed.us

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